

Today's Topics:

Letter from the FCC: 20M Maritime Mobile Net

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From: gem.mps.ohio-state.edu!wuarchive!emory!stiatl!rsiatl!jgd@tut.cis.ohio-state.edu (John G. De Armond)

Subject: Letter from the FCC: 20M Maritime Mobile Net

In article <2517@wyse.wyse.com> steve@wyse.UUCP (Steve Wilson xttemp dept303) writes:

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>First off, your judging an entire organization by one individual's
>performance. (At least thats what you've written about so far)>Secondly, I do congratulate you on putting together an effective group,
>but I'd like to challenge you with the possibility that you could have
>been that much more effective if you'd joined ARES, and tried to change
>them!

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>The fact that ARES didn't work in your county doesn't mean it isn't an
>extremely effective group in other locals!

Well, I did not think it important to the subject but I HAVE lived in many areas and am not basing my observation on just one example. In my career, I've lived in Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Penna, New Jersey, New York, and Ohio. By "lived" I mean setting up an appartment, getting active in the local ham activities and, of course, paying repeater club dues :-) Almost without exception, the ARES group has been totally ineffective, being more concerned with absolute adherence with procedure and reporting channels than with the service they perform. And ARES is usually overloaded with the Brown Shirt brigade types. (00s in ARRL parlance).

On the other hand, in areas where there HAS been a credible emergency service, it has almost invariably been disassociated with the ARRL. I'll freely admit that I've not spent enough time in the West to have an opinion. I'm absolutely sure your organization works. I'm just as sure that if the ARES shroud were removed, it would work at least as well if not better.

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>You typically can't do that in a large metropolitan area. There aren't
>any free channels. Thats why we are asked in to help in the first place.

But you don't understand. As an emergency manager, given at least a tiny amount of money, I WOULD find a way to communicate if ham radio

was not available. I could not accept "can't" as an answer. This concept is central to my point. Hams are used because they are free and available and mostly useful. Have them go away and we'll find other means. If the managers and their political bosses in an area CANNOT do this, they should be replaced.

>So this really comes down to the issue of training! First I'd like to
>point out that your major concern seems to be primarily radiation hazard
>monitoring.

Not at all. Sorry to have left that impression. I wore 2 hats. One was the RSO for a large area encompassing 2 nuclear power plants, a major North-South freeway, and which lies just outside Oak Ridge. Nuclear monitoring is a concern. But my other role as communications officer took most of the time. Because of a high concentration of chemical manufacturing and because of freak weather conditions, most of my time was spent worrying about HAZMAT incidents (about one major one a month) and tornados (several during my tenure).

>You've chosen to train hams to do that job. That's all
>well and good, but that ISN'T what the kind of service we've typically
>been asked to give. Our job is communications! You insist on trying
>to train your poeple outside their initial area of interest. Maybe your
>recruiting your volunteers from the wrong pool.

NO! And this is the most critical point I'm trying to get across here relative to emergency service. I do not need "arbitrary units of communications". I need people who have the capability to set up communications links AND do something productive. I cannot afford to send hams into situations where they are oblivious to what is happening and who have to be watched like children. I'm using strong but accurate language here. Neither can I expose more personnel than absolutely necessary to a hazard whether it be nuclear, chemical or whatever. It violates all concepts of ALARA to have unnecessary personnel in a hazard zone. Hams who can do nothing besides communicate are worse than worthless.

I agree that this kind of service is non-traditional. When I started, the Director or Chiefs would never have thought of integrating ham radio into the emergency plan. The image of the slob with the broken equipment and loud mouth was firmly entrenched. But we showed them that hams COULD take on other than support roles. Those active roles will be remembered long after the station at the shelter is forgotten. IT puts ham radio in a vastly more powerful position to be written in as an integral part of the emergency plan.

Yes, H&W traffic is important but on a whole different (and much lower) plane than tactical communications. Hams do now contribute much to the H&W mission.

But the critical missions, and those for which we can become indispensable, are the tactical situations when the standard channels fail for some reason.

>If you use the hams
>in the areas that they are already schooled in you'll have a higher
>rate of success.

I suspect it is less a problem in your area but here, ham radio is firmly a blue collar hobby. The typical ham is rather poorly technically educated. He has an interest in talking on the radio and perhaps dabbling in packet but from my perspective, he starts out as a block of clay to be shaped through training to work efficiently in emergency services. Things like reading a radiation meter or taking air samples or tagging along with a chief to provide tactical communications is not hard to teach and is actually fun.

Unfortunately, a lot of hams I've dealt with are acutely self-conscious about their lack of technical skills. They tend to cover for this problem by throwing up a front and refusing amidst a large huff, any attempt at training. I have learned to work around this problem but it IS a problem.

>If you take a normal citizen off the street he can
>be trained with some effort to look at a meter, read same, etc.
>Is it as easy to take somebody off the street and ask him to install
>a working antenna system?

Quite frankly, yes. Anyone who is handy with tools can take an antenna out of a package, hook cable up to it, and plug the transceiver in. That is the extent of many ham's technical knowledge these days. Two incidents I witnessed makes the point. I overheard a club vice president and extra class license holder brag to an outsider that he would probably have trouble changing a fuse in the club station. He went on to describe how he had Bashed his license and was encouraging the outsider to follow a similiar path. This was not a case of someone competent deprecating himself to make a stranger comfortable. This guy was genuinely proud of his ignorance.

Another incident happened recently when I happened to be in Cleveland, TN and tuned the local repeater. A guy with an extra class call was describing this new amplifier he had just swapped for. His buddy was asking how many watts that "linyer" put out. This guy said "I'm not sure but it says right here - 117 VAC in, 13.6 VDC out!" he went on to say that he was not sure how to convert those numbers into watts. Extreme examples? Unfortunately, no.

>Don't misunderstand that the organization I represent doesn't have
>its set of training problems. We certainly do. We have maybe 100
>fairly well trained individuals within the county out of 5000 hams.

You've provided one clue to your success. You have at least an
order of magnitude more hams trained than exist in most areas around
here.

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>Why are you so afraid of the FCC? Have you forgotten that they work
>for you(John Q Public ;-)

I am by no means afraid of the FCC. Most people who know me on the
air know that I make extremely liberal interpretations of the rules.
Hey, I've never had a pink slip so why not? :-) :-)

On the other hand, I DID spend the first 8 years of my career in
government service. I saw firsthand how a pissed off bureaucrat,
especially one who senses some degree of public support, can muck
up the works. You have to remember that many bureaucrats exist
for the principle function of fouling peoples' lives up. In this
game, we will be vastly better off if we get along with the power
structure rather than bucking it. You must remember that we are a
tiny minority.

I hope the FCC does NOT take the "work for the public" bit too seriously.
The public's interest and ours rarely coincide.

Let me give a hypothetical example. Consider a demagogic politico who
decides that a "citizen communications" issue will get some votes.
He starts giving speeches in which he describes Ham radio as nothing
more than a bunch of government pampered, spoiled brats who have
been given a vast chunk of public resource for their own personal use.
He then describes how the public could benefit if a new "citizens
communications" service were to be created from these frequencies so
that anyone who wanted to could talk rather than some old farts with
their strange blather and habits.

First thing you know, Ted Koppel will do a NightLine on the subject. He'll
have a Commissioner on one side and some fast talking, shrill, blathermouth
from "Citizen Communication Watch" on the other side. The Commissioner, being
a typical bureaucrat, will appear to be a bumbling fool who can't
string 10 words together into one sentence. He'll go away licking
his wounds and vow to never let that happen again. And true to the
breed, he'll take the easy way out. He'll advocate some modified (so
he can take credit, of course) version of what the shill proposed.
When Congress holds hearings on the subject, it will be all over but
the crying. All the public works we've done in the past won't mean squat.

You think that could not happen? Just take one look at the media-created Assault Rifle Ban hysteria to see a textbook case.

> If FCC makes
>rules we don't like then we have the right/obligation to petition
>them to change these rules.

I agree. But we've got to make more of a case than simply that we deserve better!

If they don't listen, then we can go to
>their bosses and cause some changes that way. Now I'm not as niave
>as the last two sentences may illustrate :-) but I do believe that
>if you think your getting stepped on then you best squeak up!

Yep, and even if we all managed to agree on something (did the earth stop turning? :-), we'd still be a squeak.

One thing I believe many hams have not yet realized is that for years we had a very, very critical and very powerful ally in Barry Goldwater. Barry's gone and I've yet to see anyone even start to fill in. What is now happening is simply that we're being exposed to the (ab)normal operation of politics.

>>Rather than play contest for SET, the club made arrangements to work with
>>the city and county police agencies such that the club set up a parallel
>>dispatch network for the police. A ham rode in each police car that
>>participated. Another ham set up at the dispatch center. Each piece of
>>traffic was handled in parallel by the police and the ham dispatcher.
>>The drill was TREMENDOUSLY sucessful. A large number of important
>>government officials got to see ham radio at its finest.

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>This is what the ARES should be doing in your local(in conjuction with
>the local ham club!). When hams talk to the agencies they serve they
>find out what kinds of supplemental comm is needed. This is certainly
>the place to start!.

I disagree strongly. ARES has nothing to do with it. This is quite properly a local club function. This idea was locally conceived and locally executed. Yes, there are a lot of hams participating who are ARES members. I consider that a personal choice of no import to the mission. I hope I can take a tiny bit of credit here. I've dressed down a number of ARES people for the worthless activities that formerly were the norm. And I'm damn sure not part of ARES.

I'll cite another example. A couple of summers ago, we had a freak combination of weather and telephone foulups resulted in 2 towns loosing

all phone service for almost 24 hours. This included the wireline links for the police departments.

Coincidentally, the club was playing field day. When the word came in, the drill was immediately secured and the real thing began. By the time the ARES types had finished arguing about jurisdiction and authority and such, we were already deployed at vital places like the police departments, the hospitals and in my case, a very nice retirement home. (boy, could those folks cook! :-)

A second very important lesson was learned from this exercise. The bulk of the hospital traffic was handled over a cellular phone I supplied along with a power supply to run it. The Cell service, being microwave, was working fine. This may not always be the case but who cares. It was working that time and we took advantage of it. How many times have you heard hams absolutely refuse to interoperate with other media? How many packet BBS sysops have you heard totally dismiss any possibility of making up missing links with dialup connections? A bunch in my case.

I hope this discussion is nothing more than that - a discussion. I hope that none of the bad stuff happens. But I suspect that it will. I hope that I've at least made a few people think a bit about ham radio and its status in the modern world.

73 John

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John De Armond, WD40QC	Manual? ... What manual ?!?
Radiation Systems, Inc.	Atlanta, GA This is Unix, My son, You
emory!rsiatl!jgd	**I am the NRA** just GOTTA Know!!!

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